



USAG BENELUX Quarterly

VOL. 1, ISSUE 4, Winter 2022
LINE OF EFFORT 4: SERVICES

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TOP OPPOSITE: Community members with the Army Community Service wait to board a boat as part of an Army Community Service trip to explore the town of Bruges, Belgium. ACS frequently makes host nation orientation trips with community members to familiarize them with Belgium. More on Page 9. (U.S. Army photo by Melissa Westerlind, USAG Benelux ACS)

BOTTOM, OPPOSITE PAGE: Belgian-American singer and performer BJ Scott, right, plays during the inaugural Chièvres Air Fest Sept. 25, 2021. The event was the culmination of a lot of hard work by members of the garrison, including from the Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation. More on Page 6. (U.S. Army photo by Libby Weiler, USAG Benelux Public Affairs)

April Hawk, graphic art designer with the Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation, looks over the "Pledge to our Customers" on an easel in the U.S. Army Garrison Benelux headquarters building Jan. 28, 2022. (U.S. Army photo by Marie-Lise Baneton, USAG Benelux Public Affairs)



A note on this publication, on services

By the editorial staff

This publication is the fourth in a series of quarterly online magazines scheduled to be produced by the U.S. Army Garrison Benelux Public Affairs staff, compiled from new and existing stories.

Each online quarterly focuses on one of the garrison's major lines of effort in accomplishing its mission and vision. Those lines of effort are 1) People, 2) Infrastructure, 3) Protection, 4) Services and 5) Operationalizing the Garrison. All four quarterlies are published online on the garrison's website, <https://home.army.mil/benelux>.

This publication focuses on services.

Services provide the crucial support to USAG Benelux community members that enable them to perform their mission, that sustain and improve their quality of life, that grants the ability for Family members to surpass expectations and achieve their goals.

As service providers, the garrison leadership has pledged the garrison to work daily to deliver high-quality products; to build relationships with the community, customers and one another; to be kind and respectful; to conduct itself professionally; to encourage feedback; to provide aesthetically pleasing facilities; to take ownership of actions; and to make moments matter for the community.

The following stories detail how Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation employees at the Chièvres Air Fest brought joy to the host nation community, how postal services ensure we maintain a tangible connection with home, how chaplains with the garrison Religious Support Office tend to the needs of their flock and anyone who needs counsel, and much more.

We hope you enjoy these stories, which represent only a small fraction of the dedication the garrison takes on behalf of those who work and live in the Benelux.

At USAG Benelux, 'mail equals morale'

By Jessica Abbas,
USAG Benelux Public Affairs

[EDITOR'S NOTE: This was originally published in December 2021.]

BRUNSSUM, Netherlands – "This is the time of year we live for," said Josh Alo, postmaster at U.S. Army Garrison Benelux - Brussels. "Even in the digital age where so much is online, it is the little pieces of home that keep us connected to one another."

Across USAG Benelux, team members and volunteers work to meet the demands

both of the holiday season and the ongoing pandemic.

"Last year we had a 20 percent increase in volume of mail we processed, and that has been sustained due to online shopping and ever-changing COVID-19 measures that drive how we gain our goods," said Alo. "So we're definitely busy!"

"It's an honest day's work," said Alan Boswell, postmaster at USAG Benelux-Brunssum, the Netherlands. "It is hard work but at the end of the day we've accomplished something good, something where

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A U.S. Army Postal Service employee moves parcels at Chièvres Air Base during the 2021 holiday season. (U.S. Army photo by Libby Weiler, USAG Benelux Public Affairs)



A community member drops off a handtruck of mail at the Chièvres Air Base community mail room. (U.S. Army photo by Libby Weiler, USAG Benelux Public Affairs)

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they (each employee) can go home and hold their head up about knowing they have helped people get their mail.

"Being able to care for friends and Family in this manner is a good thing!" Boswell continued.

The postal service centers operate at four physical locations across the Benelux: Chièvres Air Base, Brussels and SHAPE in Belgium and Brunssum in the Netherlands. The Brunssum site also conducts weekly mail calls to Army Prepositioned Stock Site Dülmen. Their mission is part of a larger transportation network.

"Our combined efforts help support the embassies, NATO, port operations and ensure mail for you personally and officially is accessible," said Alo.

USAG Benelux postal service centers support approximately 5,000 customers and 139 official units. And as of publication of this article, this holiday season the Benelux postal service centers have received and processed 11,779 mail pieces weighing in at 67,848 kilograms, the equivalent of almost

150,000 pounds of mail.

"I've seen a lot of changes from the beginning from when we didn't have computers and everything was handwritten," said Wes Cook postmaster at SHAPE. "Yet, everything is still the same, it's just processed differently and we don't use a lot of ink anymore. It's computerized now."

"What you see at the customer service counter for retail services is a small portion of what our teams do every day," said Alo. "If you were to pull back the curtain, there's a lot that goes into processing mail."

Alo, Boswell and Cook collectively explained the rigors of the postal service include regular mandatory training and daily electronic documentation, inspections, accounting procedures, customer service and the physical aspect of processing mail from unloading trucks to scanning, sorting, delivering and receiving items from customers and preparing outgoing shipments. Each step and function requires acute attention to detail, accuracy, stamina and, most important, enthusiasm.

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Postal service employees are not permitted to take leave during the holiday season, they answer the call to serve and leave is paused for all until January.

"I'm used to this arrangement during the holiday season," said Boswell. "I got out of the military in 1993 and a couple months after I got out ironically enough I started as a seasonal hire, and here I am today the postmaster."

"We're here to help," he continued. "We are prideful about our ability to deliver 100% of the packages during this season."

New internal tracking technology that rolled out this summer has helped improve postal operations. Nevertheless, with each location processing between 500 and 3,000 pieces of mail a day, errors can occur.

"We deliver thousands of mail pieces a week but that one piece that a customer says they didn't have or we didn't find, we go through our records and our shelves with a fine-tooth comb to find it," said Boswell. "We take it personally and don't sleep until we can resolve the issue."

"It's so easy to make a single mistake that we have to have a quality control system in place to check one another's work and that helps tremendously," said Cook.

Having served in the armed forces prior to their current positions, they know firsthand the importance of mail for service members and their Families stationed away from home.

"Customers are coming to the post office to see if they've got mail and when they do many times they respond with excitement whether that's a package or letter or card," said Alo. "It means so much and it's why we do what we do."

"I got a card recently for my birthday, and it was the best thing ever!" continued Alo. "We do so much on technology, which is great, but the tangible effort that comes from the physical pieces of mail, it's different. Someone took time to buy a card and stamp, write a note and post it to me ... and our customers, our Soldiers and their Families, it's the same for them."

"We not only deliver mail but also have the responsibility for what the customers bring us and make sure it's gets to its destination," said Boswell. "We know how hard it is especially with all the COVID measures, the separation, mail is a way for people to connect and send something home."

Even with the demands from the season and the pandemic, the team continues to enjoy a bit of levity that arrives from time to time with the mail trucks.

"Back in the early days of COVID when the stores would only give you so many shopping carts someone actually ordered a shopping cart that arrived on our truck," said Cook. "Not sure if they kept it, but that was funny."

And the teams appreciate the generosity from members of the community.

"Customers bring us treats, cookies and cakes throughout the year and before the holidays," said Shawn Mestres, postal operations supervisor at Chièvres. "It's not necessary but it is very much appreciated."

Mestres explained in the final week before Christmas there's an even bigger push internally to make sure all the mail possible is pushed out to customers in time to have presents under the tree.

"We're here to help our community," said Mestres. "And to see the smiles when you give out a package even if someone is having a bad day, you give them the mail or a package, they always smile!"

"Bottom line," said Alo "mail equals morale!"

The team also offered up some tips and reminders to help the community.

"When folks are notified they have mail, picking up your packages is key; it keeps things moving," said Alo. "And it helps us help other customers and get things to you as quickly as possible."

"If we didn't need it we wouldn't ask for it," said Boswell referencing customs and shipping forms. "Sometimes people don't like the systems we're required to use and it can be difficult at times but we'll come alongside them to help with the problem or the issue, just ask."

Inaugural Chièvres Air Fest draws large crowd of Belgians, Americans, allies

Story by Bryan Gatchell,
USAG Benelux Public Affairs

CHIÈVRES, Belgium – When U.S. Army Garrison Benelux opened Chièvres Air Base Sept. 25 to the off-post community for the first time in 25 years, the off-post community thronged.

An estimated 15,000 Belgians, Americans, and other allied partners attended the inaugural Chièvres Air Fest, where they climbed into static aircraft, interacted with period-uniformed volunteers and historic vehicles, ate food from local vendors, listened to live music and watched fireworks.

Helping facilitate this massive influx of people, offering them a wide variety of fun activities to do throughout the afternoon and into the evening, a host of garrison employees from every directorate and office took part in the planning, set-up and execution. Chief among these organizations was the Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation.

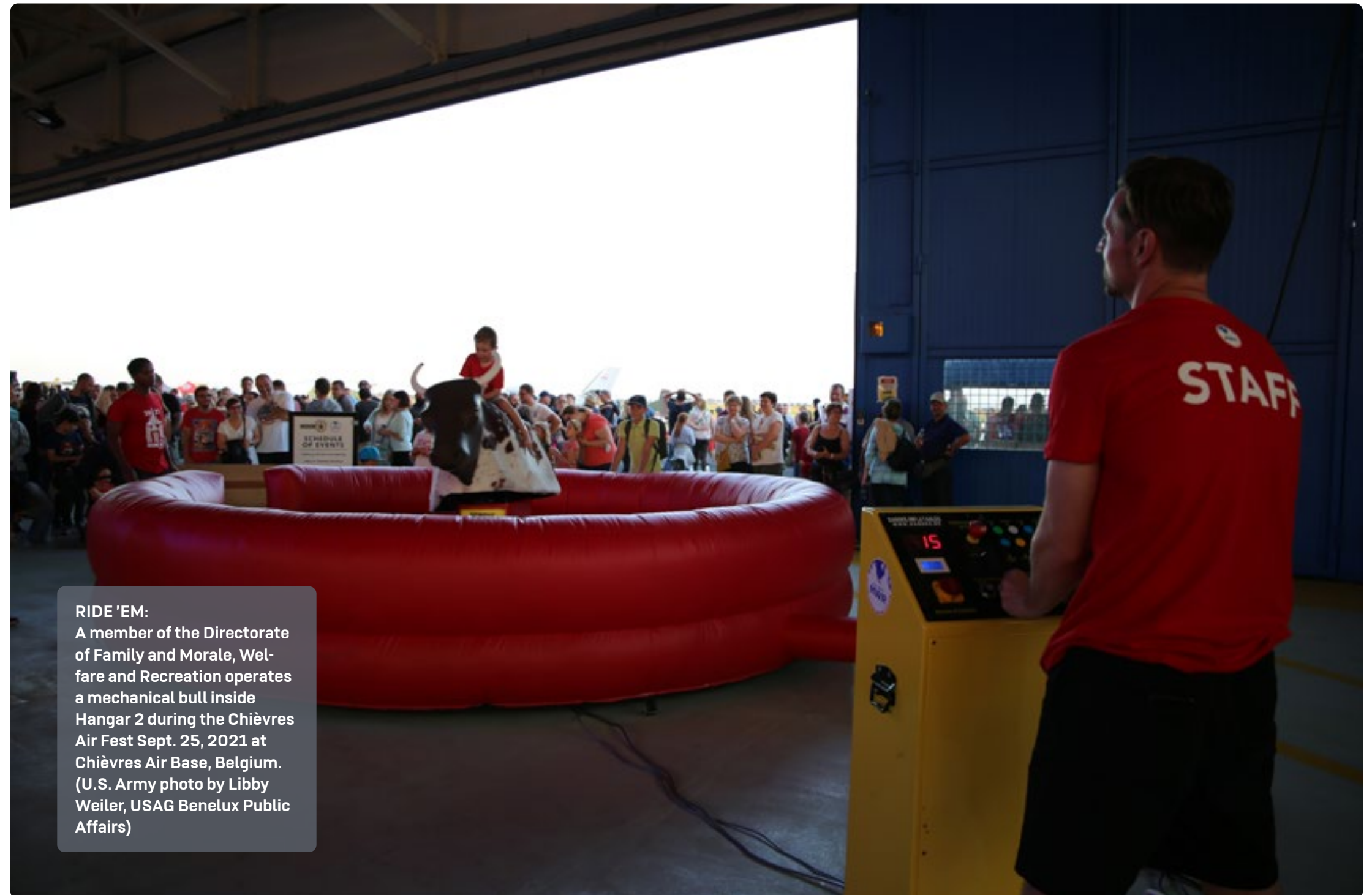
Coming from the Chièvres / SHAPE and Brussels communities in Belgium and the Brunssum community in the Netherlands, FMWR employees set up sound equipment, food and drink booths, rides, games and did much more to ensure the thousands of guests from the host nation community had a safe and enjoyable time.

The fest was the first time since 1996 that the air base hosted a community event of this scale.

To accommodate a crowd of this size, garrison personnel ensured everyone entering post had received vaccinations for COVID-19, had recovered from COVID-19 within the past six months or had a recent negative COVID-19 test.

Col. James Yastrzemsky, the commander of the garrison, welcomed the gathered multitude.

"I am reminded of the deep gratitude our host nation displays for our U.S. service members who came before us and served



RIDE 'EM:
A member of the Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation operates a mechanical bull inside Hangar 2 during the Chièvres Air Fest Sept. 25, 2021 at Chièvres Air Base, Belgium. (U.S. Army photo by Libby Weiler, USAG Benelux Public Affairs)

and sacrificed on this sacred ground that we serve on each day," he said. "You guys consider it a duty to remember, and we are forever grateful for that."

Shortly after he finished speaking, Belgian paratroopers descended on the airfield from a bright blue sky.

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Outside the open bay doors of hangars 1 and 2 at the airfield, planes and helicopters and their crews greeted visitors. The U.S. Army, U.S. Air Force and Belgian, Romanian and Slovenian air forces brought their aircraft to the event. The pilots and crews showed the visitors the cockpit and gave tours of the

larger aircraft. Personnel from 12th Combat Aviation Brigade, stationed at Katterbach Army Airfield in Ansbach, Germany, fitted children with helmet and flight vest outside of their AH-64 Apache helicopter. A glider group from the Zutendaal, Belgium in the tri-border area brought their glider with

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LEFT: Host nation community members visit a game operated by the Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation. (Courtesy photo)

RIGHT: Col. James Yastrzemsky, at podium, commander of U.S. Army Garrison Benelux, welcomes the host nation to the inaugural Chièvres Air. (U.S. Army photo by Christophe Morel, USAG Benelux Public Affairs)



(Continued from previous page) them. And a Belgian Airbus A400M, a turboprop military transport aircraft, landed at and took off from the airfield.

Between hangars 1 and 2, visitors got a close-up look at a variety of historic military vehicles. They also got the chance to talk with the volunteers who dressed in period uniform and showed off their vehicles.

Also between the hangars, Families enjoyed carnival games, including a high striker, ax-throwing contest, lasso roping and more.

The visual centerpiece inside Hangar 1 was an M3 Stuart light tank named "Fish n' Chips" behind which hung an American flag several meters wide and tall.

The International Museum of Chièvres Air Base was on hand and interacting with guests, and the Belgian Air Component, who were celebrating their 75th anniversary, were on hand as well.

The Mons Memorial Museum, who showed their feature-length partially reenacted documentary *Résistantes*, which recounted the story of female Belgian resistance fighters during World War II, including that of Léonce Descamps, who reported German aircraft movement at Chièvres in 1944

when she was 16. Descamps herself was in attendance at distinguished visitors reception at Hangar 1, where she was recognized for her courageous actions.

As live music and a DJ played, Families purchased a variety of foods from vendors on the tarmac, picnicking on the grassy area and eating Greek, Texan, Mexican and many other types of food.

As the sun sank into the west, the carnival rides started up.

Behind the scenes, U.S. military and Belgian local and Federal emergency first responders stood at the ready to protect the community.

In Hangar 2, tables were set up, as was a mechanical bull. But as evening deepened, the concert stage lit up, and singer and Belgian-American celebrity BJ Scott performed a set of her rock and blues repertoire. Scott, besides being a famous singer and performer in Belgium, is also one of the coaches on *The Voice Belgique*, the French-speaking Belgian version of *The Voice* television franchise. She is also a radio show host on French-speaking Classic 21.

After her set concluded, the crowd left the hangars and watched a display of fireworks to finish the evening.



TOP: USAG Benelux community members visit Bruges, Belgium.



LEFT: Community members hold up their MOBIB cards, which grants them paid access to Brussels public transportation.



RIGHT: Two children work on Halloween decorations. All these photos are part of programs operated by ACS. (U.S. Army photos by Melissa Westerlind, USAG Benelux ACS)

ACS works hard, delivers

ZAVENTEM, Belgium – Army Community Services across U.S. Army Garrison Benelux provide comprehensive, coordinated and responsive services that support readiness of Soldiers, civilian employees and their Families. ACS maximizes technology and resources, and adapts to unique requirements at each of its communities.

Programs within ACS include Army Emergency Relief, Emergency Placement Care, Employment and Volunteer Opportunities, the Exceptional Family Member Program,

the Family Advocacy Program, the Financial Readiness Program, Relocation Readiness, Sexual Harassment / Assault Response and Prevention, Survivor Outreach Services and more.

Living within Belgium and the tri-border region comes with its own set of difficulties, and ACS will also work to ensure community members know how to adjust to life in a different nation. In the photographs here, community members visit new towns, learn how to take public transportation and more.



Chaplain (Maj.) Jonathan Averill, community chaplain at U.S. Army Garrison Benelux - Brussels, takes notes before the Protestant service Jan. 23, 2022. (U.S. Army photo by Bryan Gatchell, USAG Benelux Public Affairs)

Chaplains nurture living, care for wounded, honor dead

Story by Libby Weiler,
USAG Benelux Public Affairs

CHIÈVRES, Belgium – The U.S. Army Chaplain Corps has been taking care of Soldiers, Family members and civilians since its beginning July 29, 1775, and they continue to serve communities across the globe.

"We predate the constitution," said Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Thomas Gidley, U.S. Army Garrison Benelux chaplain. "General Washington recognized the need to care for the moral and spiritual needs of the Soldiers – that it was essential – so he petitioned Congress for chaplains. We have been right there beside Soldiers from day one.

"An old way to describe this is ministry of presence," continued Gidley.

Across the Benelux footprint – at Brunssum in the Netherlands and at Brussels, SHAPE and Chièvres Air Base in Belgium – chaplains are available to community members 24/7.

"One of the main roles as a chaplain is to provide and advise," said Chaplain (Maj.) Jonathan Averill, the chaplain at USAG Benelux – Brussels.

Chaplain (Maj.) Bernardino Yebra, SHAPE chaplain, who became a priest 30 years ago and then joined the Army, said the chaplaincy is his calling within the calling.

"If you see a U.S. Army chaplain, you will see the cross on our PC (patrol cap) and uniforms," said Yebra. "It tells the Soldier that yes, here is an officer, but his calling is to pro-

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Staff Sgt. Fofanah Samcess, noncommissioned officer in charge of Religious Services for U.S. Army Garrison Benelux, delivers the invocation during the garrison change of responsibility ceremony between Command Sgt. Maj. Katrina M. Herzfeld (outgoing) and Command Sgt. Maj. Gary E. Yurgans (incoming) at Chièvres Air Base, Belgium, Nov. 5, 2021. (U.S. Army photo by Pierre-Etienne Courtois, Training Support Center - Benelux)

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vide religious support."

"The Army is actually addressing the holistic care for Soldiers, addressing the fact that we acknowledge as an institution that there's more to individuals than just the flesh and bones," said Gidley. "We look at the individual from a holistic perspective; you've got the physical, spiritual and mental aspect."

The U.S. Army's multi-faith approach ensures individuals the right to practice the distinct doctrines of their own belief system. The Army has recognized and accepted over 100 faith groups, incorporating traditional approaches to ministry but also including individuals with atheist, agnostic or no religious beliefs. The chaplaincy program itself has evolved over the years to include Protestant, Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist chaplains.

"We talk to all kinds of people. It doesn't

matter what religious background you are," said Staff Sgt. Samcess J. Fofanah, religious affairs noncommissioned officer, USAG Benelux - Brunssum. "You are a part of our Family, (and) we are a part of your Family."

Caring for people is at the heart of the Army Chaplain Corps. Issues can arise, as they do with most individuals and Families, and chaplains are there to help foster safe places in our communities to wrestle with issues and talk through challenges.

"When someone is going through the deepest crisis that goes to the core of who they are, they have all this internal turmoil," said Gidley. "Just like a soda can, once you shake it all up, the pressure has to go somewhere."

While some can work through things internally, others may need to talk through things.

"Where better can they go to 'verbal-
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ly vomit' their issue and sort it out?" he asked.

Although chaplains provide a listening ear, Averill finds joy making connections within his community.

"I enjoy preaching, and I enjoy all the services, but I would say the real thing is just being relational. That's one of the things that I find a lot of enjoyment out of being a chaplain."

"Whatever you do, you touch someone's heart," said Fofanah.

Chaplains in the Army specialize in one of five specialty areas: resource management, ethics, world religions, Family life, or clinical pastoral education.

As young chaplains progress in their career through their first or second assignment, according to Gidley, they let the corps know what their interest is.

"Each chaplain has their endorsing agency – their denomination," said Gidley. "From a Christian perspective the Bible says, do not serve two masters, but from a chaplain's perspective I've got three or four. I have the chief of chaplains, who is a proponent for all assignments and personnel matters within the Chaplain Corps. I've got my commander, I've got my endorser, and I've got God."

Chaplains also have an obligation to the people they counsel.

"One thing unique about the Chaplain Corps – we have 100 percent confidentiality," said Gidley. "I playfully tell folks that I'm kind of the Vegas of counselors. What's said with me stays with me."

The Religious Support Office has both chaplains and religious affairs specialists dispersed throughout the Benelux.

"If you don't feel comfortable talking to a chaplain, you can always talk to a religious affairs specialist," said Fofanah. "We are also a listening ear."

While taking care of people is at the core of the chaplaincy program, chaplains also provide religious support in their communities. Weekly church services and small groups take place on SHAPE, in Brussels and in Brunssum.



U.S. Army Garrison Benelux chaplains cut a birthday cake in celebration of the Chaplain Corps' 246 birthday at Chièvres Air Base, Chièvres Belgium. (Photo by Libby Weiler, USAG Benelux Public Affairs)

"For the garrison our duties are to conduct services every week," said Fofanah.

Yebra provides mass and sacraments daily to community members.

"If you'll ask me what's my favorite part in my ministry, that's my favorite part: providing the sacrament of presence, which we call the Eucharist, to our Soldiers and their Families."

Outside of regular church services, chaplains make themselves available to the community in a number of ways.

"I do battlefield circulation," said Yebra. "I make myself visible and make the ministry present to whoever needs religious support or a chaplain's presence."

Chaplains are also there to help build bridges and bring communities together. Recent Thanksgiving and winter holiday events have been a success because of teamwork between the Religious Support Office and the Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation at Brussels.

This year, the Religious Support Office is looking into having more of a presence on the air by collaborating with American Forces Network.

"We may have an AFN radio station – a chaplain hour that is upcoming," said Yebra. "That's one way of communicating and providing a chaplain's presence to SHAPE and the whole Benelux area."

While serving the community is a core

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Chaplains discuss operationalizing religious support services during a training event at Chièvres Air Base, Belgium, Feb. 27, 2020. (Courtesy photo)

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part of their job, chaplains in the Benelux have had to rethink ways of serving communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. When in-person services were halted during the pandemic, livestreaming was made available to the community.

"As Catholics we always believe that if you are going to attend a mass, it's just like attending some kind of a meal and you have to be present and enjoy the meal, enjoy the presence," said Yebra. "We had to change the reception of the Eucharist, the blessed consecrated bread and wine."

Due to the pandemic, Yebra hasn't been able to serve the Eucharist in a normal fashion.

"We just distributed the consecrated host, the body of Christ."

"Even though there is a hindrance with what we want to do, the old normal, a part of me says maybe that's a good thing to have that hunger," said Gidley. "There will come a day when we will take these masks off. How do we prepare ourselves for that now?"

Although chaplains view their work as a

calling, it can come with its own set of challenges at times.

"There were times where I had extremely low moments," said Gidley.

While stationed in Kandahar, Afghanistan a mentor and friend passed through and got to spend some time with him due to a canceled flight.

"He just looked at me straight in the eyes and said, 'What's going on?'" Gidley said of the encounter. "I looked at him and said, 'Have a seat.' My friend Kim was exactly who I needed and God brought him literally 5,000 miles to my doorstep."

Fofanah explains being a chaplain does not make you less human.

"Just because we are religious affairs specialist and the Chaplain Corps doesn't mean that we don't make mistakes. We are human."

For Yebra, the brotherhood of priests is one big factor that keeps him healthy in the ministry.

"It can be draining physically being the only Catholic priest here."

Although his nearest brother priest is in Geilenkirchen, Germany, they still make time to break bread together whenever possible.

While in seminary, Averill connected with many of his fellow classmates.

"It is a blessing the fact that I had those friends," said Averill. "We still stay in contact with each other and check in on each other."

"It (chaplaincy) can be taxing – emotionally, physically, and spiritually," said Gidley, "but at the same time according to my faith tradition, if I'm serving where God has placed me, then that brings me joy."

The U.S. Army Chaplain Corps has served and continues to serve, during war-time and peace, in communities across the globe.

"We are always there to contribute to the readiness of our troops," said Yebra.

Yebra went on to say the Chaplain Corps always answers the call "to nurture the living, care for the wounded, (and) honor the dead."

Deborah Goldfein, library technician at USAG Benelux – Brussels in Zaventem, Belgium, re-arranges ax-throwing art at the parking lot gazebo July 29, 2021, as part of the library's outreach program.



Praise for Benelux libraries is overdue

Story and photos by Bryan Gatchell,
USAG Benelux Public Affairs

ZAVENTEM, Belgium – The library, an aphoristically quiet location, became yet quieter for the four branches at U.S. Army Garrison Benelux as pandemic prevention took priority over day-to-day operations.

Nevertheless, the library staff at the Chièvres Air Base, SHAPE and Brussels in Belgium and at JFC Brunssum in the Netherlands strived to not only connect their patrons to resources but to the communities the patrons live in.

The libraries on post are places newcomers sometimes visit as part of their in-process-

ing, a place Families browse for books, videos and video games, where a high schooler can find books germane to an assigned research topic, where an employee can check out a tin for baking a cake for a going-away party. It can be a place where children can craft, where they can read through books without checking them out. The library is where a service member, trying to get a better understanding of the community, can check out French or Dutch language learning material or ask the staff for online learning resources. The libraries provide respites of quiet, study and reflection.

"That's what's so great about Army libraries," said Holly May, the supervisory librarian at USAG Benelux – Brussels in Zaven-

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tem, Belgium. "We're a third space. We're not your home, we're not your work. You don't have to pay money to be here. You can come and exist in this space and the only resource that you have to give up is your time, just the time that you're willing to come and exist in the library space."

May joined the library team in the midst of the pandemic. As a civilian in the military community since 2003 who has undertaken many overseas permanent changes of station, she said her transition to Brussels during this time was the toughest PCS. Her staff ameliorated the difficulties of the move.

"One of the things that has really impressed me about the Brussels library staff that I was lucky to join is that they know the community," she said. "They are part of the community. They know people by name. They know people's reading and watching habits and listening habits. When patrons come in, staff are able to recommend different things. And by additional things, I don't just mean library resources, I mean recommending plac-

es to go and visit, places in Brussels to go and see."

For people staying at Chièvres Air Base lodge, often during in-processing while looking for housing off-post, the library is one of the convenient locations within walking distance. Lisa Steinacker, the director for SHAPE International Library and Chièvres Branch Library, outlined its convenient location as part of the Community Activity Center, which also houses the fitness center and the Bene Brew Café and Pub.

"It's a great first stop for people that are in the lodge," said Steinacker. "A lot of times we get a lot of people coming through during PCS season that are stuck in the Lodge, they don't have a car, Family members. It's a great place to come to get out of the room, to relax, to have something for your kids to do, to read something or to get away from the craziness of PCS."

The Community Activity Center is also near the single service member barracks, so they often receive foot traffic from there as well.

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Holly May, the supervisory librarian at USAG Benelux – Brussels in Zaventem, Belgium, sets up shadow puppets during story time July 26, 2021.

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Steinacker also credited the staff for providing "that smaller community feel."

"Everybody knows each other there, which is always really fun."

Steinacker also lauded the staff of the SHAPE library, who represent 10 different nations and collectively speak 16 different languages, an important asset at the multinational military complex.

"It is such an amazing experience for me personally to have the ability to work with and engage with so many people from so many different countries."

The SHAPE International Library has two collections in one building. In part it is an American library like any other U.S. Army library. It is also funded by the analogous morale and welfare organization of SHAPE, and their stacks include sections in many of the different languages spoken throughout NATO. Besides French, Dutch and German, the official languages of Belgium, there are sections in Polish, Danish, Turkish, Hungarian and many others.

The staff has even produced videos in non-English languages as part of the outreach to their diverse patronage.

Steinacker said it has been challenging acquainting the on-base population at SHAPE with the diversity of languages the library accommodates.

The library at NATO Joint Forces Command Brunssum serves a similarly multinational population in addition to their U.S. Army patrons at USAG Benelux – Brunssum.

"If they have questions, they are always welcome to ask and we will always help as much as possible from our side," said Susanne Schaefer, senior library technician and acting library director at the JFC Brunssum Library.

Much like the other libraries at USAG Benelux, the JFC Brunssum Library has found programming difficult during the times of COVID-19. In accord with the Dutch COVID-19 preventive measures current as of publication, events such as LEGO play must be limited to Families singly. Many of the crafts and instruction, such as the Valentines crafts,

patrons can take away with them when they visit the library.

Schaefer looks to do more with programming once the public health situation improves and staffing increases at the library.

For the libraries across the garrison, the restrictions necessitated by the pandemic meant a pivot from physical to digital resources. Story times were done by online video as were some tutorials. The wealth of ebooks, online audio books, subscription tutorial services, language training and more were being increasingly used during the first months of the pandemic.

"A lot of our content is already virtual," said Steinacker. "A lot of people don't realize that, and so it was a great opportunity for us to push our online content, because that's all they had."

Steinacker also praised library technician Dan O'Reilly at the Chièvres library for his ability to conduct story times.

"Dan is a trained musician," she said. "He just brings amazing light to story time that us non-musicians are always envious of. He plays the piano. The kids just adore him. He's just a great storyteller."

May also recounted the boom of use of online resources. She also recounted that there had been a downside noticeable at the local and Army-wide library levels.

"All interactions were shifting to virtual, people were still isolating in their homes, and although ... virtual meeting spaces you're using are a good tool, it is not a good substitute for actual human interaction," said May. "Some programs have continued to be successful virtually. What I would say I see as a librarian is that people are even more so than before COVID really seeking human interaction."

As COVID-19 case numbers dropped in Belgium following the widespread implementation of vaccinations in 2021, May and her staff worked on making the library's presence better known within the Brussels community. The library is on the second floor (first floor by European reckoning) of Bldg. 4 and is

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Deborah Goldfein, library technician at USAG Benelux – Brussels in Zaventem, arranges books on the shelf at the library at USAG Benelux – Brussels.

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only accessible by elevator, making it difficult to find unless you intended to visit. During the summer the staff would hold crafting events at the main outdoor parking lot gazebo, with patrons throwing paint-dipped sponge axes or other fun events. May and staff would host some of these outdoor events on Thursday when a popular food vendor was on-hand. Hungry food patrons waiting for fish and chips would then spend time with the library staff, gaining the library visibility.

"We signed up a lot of people based on that," said May. "We pounced on them."

For the SHAPE International Library, COVID-19 preventive measures meant that programming events that might have been daylong and attract a crowd of 200 now became monthlong so crowd sizes would be smaller.

As the libraries look into the future, they look on some of the lessons learned since 2020.

"It really has opened our eyes to what we can do in the future and what we should be doing as far as doing a lot more content online," said Steinacker. "So we continue to work on creating more tutorials in different languages, because that really seems to be a hit."

The SHAPE Library is opening a Maker Space so patrons can do many do-it-yourself projects using a 3D printer, circuit makers, robotics and wood burning kits. Steinacker is looking for volunteers who are willing to share their time and expertise.

"There will be a lot of opportunities for volunteering at a library," she said.

The Brussels Library is currently undergoing some renovations, including painting and recarpeting. May and staff are looking at what arts and crafts projects they can learn well enough to teach, things like making block prints. May emphasized that some of these crafts are aimed toward adult learners as well as children.

"We're trying to make it cool," said May. "We're trying to bring a little bit of creative play as a kind of emotional and mental outlet and to connect people with each other."

Steinacker recognizes one important factor in the future of the library program throughout the garrison.

"It's not our library, it's your library," said Steinacker. "You need to come in, you need to tell us the things you want to see in your library – the programs you want to see. It's a two-way street. So we really want that engagement, otherwise we just get the things we think that you'll like."

Big, 'Boldt' colors:

SHAPE artist distinguishes herself internationally

Story and photos by Bryan Gatchell,
USAG Benelux Public Affairs

MONS, Belgium – A large green dragon has recently made the Arts and Crafts Center its home. Residing on what had been a large, blank wall, the dragon curls through a mural depicting downtown Mons amid splashes of the black, yellow and red of the Belgian flag and a large NATO logo.

The mural is the work of Jess Boldt, a Family member and artist at SHAPE, who has been honing her skills and growing her portfolio since her arrival to the area in 2019.

Boldt and her husband, U.S. Air Force Maj. Jarod Boldt, a staff officer with NATO, moved from California to Belgium in 2019 with two of their four children. Boldt began a one-year program online through the Milan Art Institute before she moved from California to Belgium.

"I brought all my painting supplies," she said. "Every week I had a class. But it really was helpful, because it kind of just helped give me some sanity on all the craziness of moving."

She said that her children would often complain of the strong smell of the oil-based paints in their lodging before they found housing.

Boldt is a mixed media artist, combining charcoal, old print, and more. In line with her ambitions as a muralist, she prefers spray paint to other material.

"I like the idea of uplifting people's moods in everyday life," said Boldt. "So I plan on being a traveling muralist, going to places and helping businesses bring to light what they do and bringing art to the community – the everyday community – and still bringing fine art to galleries and expos."

She graduated her one-year program in



THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON 'DOUDOU':
Jess Boldt, muralist, stands with her creation, a mural at the SHAPE Arts and Crafts Center featuring the town of Mons' famous festival dragon, Doudou.

2020 and built her portfolio as the COVID-19 pandemic settled over Europe. Her work features charcoal portraiture embedded with French-, Dutch- and other-language magazine print; vignettes of the American West such as horses, saguaro landscapes and mid-20th century trucks; European cityscapes such as the Eiffel Tower in Paris; and more.

She submitted selections of her work to the EuropArtFair, an exhibition in Amsterdam. **(Continued on next page)**

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dam, which took place over the July 4 weekend in 2021.

"That was a really great, eye-opening, great first impression of getting your art out there," said Boldt. "I brought 16 pieces that were framed – were hanging up – and I sold 10 of them. So that was a pretty big success."

She partly attributed her success in Amsterdam to her unique national situation – as

an American living in and representing Belgium.

Not only was the exhibition an early career commercial fruitful for Boldt, it also afforded her the opportunity to meet several other artists, even beginning a correspondence with a Dutch artist whom she greatly admired.

Additionally, Boldt joined an online art gallery with some of her fellow students at the Milan Art Institute. They now meet weekly. **(Continued on next page)**

Boldt's art has frequently adorned the gallery section of the SHAPE International Library, as it does in this photo.



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ly via video teleconference, and several took part in the Art Nordic exhibition in Copenhagen.

Her work also gained international attention locally at the library at SHAPE, which, prior to the pandemic, had regularly featured the work of artists on the post.

"We're always looking for local artists, whether they're Belgians or military dependents on the base," said Lisa Steinacker, the library director for the SHAPE International Library. "And Jess came to us before COVID; she was our last gallery display before we shut down."

The library again featured Boldt's work when they were scheduled to reopen in compliance with Belgium's COVID-19 preventive measures.

"She's got such amazing, bright work," Steinacker continued. "We thought it would bring the library back to life. It is kind of fitting considering we were closed and dormant for quite a while."

Boldt's artwork in the library drew the at-

tention of Shawna Morton, director of the Arts and Crafts Center at SHAPE. The library and Arts and Crafts Center are neighboring facilities and sibling services under U.S. Army Garrison Benelux's Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation (DFMWR).

"I've been wanting to put a mural on the wall for the two years I've been managing the facility," said Morton.

Steinacker told Morton that Boldt had been trying to make murals in the community. This opportunity excited Morton.

Morton and Boldt worked together on a design that would be at home at SHAPE.

"We talked about the idea beforehand, we tweaked it as we were going through it," said Morton. "It was very much a collaborative work in the sense that what we thought would be best for the community as a whole population, keeping in mind our locals, our 30 nations as well as our U.S. parties that are familiar with arts and crafts centers."

The two decided on a dragon to represent the city of Mons. During the Ducasse de Mons,

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Boldt is scheduled to be part of a gallery held at the Atomium in northwest Brussels later this year.

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or "Doudou," a festival taking place after Easter, a mock fight takes place between Saint George and a dragon in the central square of Mons.

Morton said she has received positive comments, especially from Families with children.

Besides beautification, the mural also draws attention to the Arts and Crafts Center.

"The main goal behind it was to really brand our space," said Morton. "With there being 30 nations in this community, not everyone has arts and crafts in their military communities. And so I hear oftentimes people will come in for framing or for engraving from other nations outside the U.S., and they do not realize that we have arts and crafts, and they do not know what that is, they do not know what that entails."

"Really the idea behind that mural was to just bring awareness to the arts," she continued. "It is in the community, and we do have opportunities for people to use space, for people to come in and buy products, to try things maybe they didn't try before, to take a new class to open their eyes to something they may have never done."

Boldt's work also adorns the work offices

of Armed Forces Network – Benelux.

This is not Boldt's first time overseas. Boldt, who hails from Hastings, Nebraska, moved to Germany with her father for five years of her childhood when her father was a U.S. Soldier.

She says that living currently at SHAPE in such a multinational environment has shaped her as an artist. Being able to go to the on-post grocery store and hear conversation spoken in a variety of languages has prompted her to extend her thinking and methods as an artist.

Recently, her work has brought her into collaborative projects, including with her fellow students from the Milan Art Institute while they were at the art exhibit in Copenhagen. A group of them painted a large bottle that was then sold at auction.

She has also curated an exhibition of her fellow students' work for the SHAPE International Library, which is on display until the end of January 2021.

More of Boldt's work can be found at her website, www.jessboldt.com.

For more on the library: <https://chievres.armymwr.com/programs/shapelibrary>.

For more on the SHAPE Arts and Crafts Center: <https://www.shape2day.com/community/leisure/arts-crafts>.

Organizational representatives and retirees talk to one another at the HUB at USAG Benelux - Brunssum.



Benelux celebrates US military retirees during appreciation day

Story and photo by Jessica Abbas,
USAG Benelux Public Affairs

BRUNSSUM, Netherlands -- To show appreciation and provide information to U.S. military Retirees and their spouses, U.S. Army Garrison Benelux hosted Retiree Appreciation Day Oct. 15, 2021, at the Brunssum site.

Attendees had access to a multitude of representatives from wellness and social groups, banking services, Veterans Affairs, Social Security, personal finance as well as health and dental organizations such as TRICARE.

"This kind of thing can't happen without everyone coming together," said Michael J. Daniels, then deputy garrison commander for U.S. Army Benelux - Brunssum. "We have to care about what it means to be a retiree, what it means to be a veteran, what it means to support and carry the torch forward. It's

important to who we are as a people, so thank you for being a part of this community.

"Thank you to those in your midst who volunteer in our community both outside the fence-line and inside the fence-line to make our community better," Daniels continued. "It's really indicative of your lifelong commitment to service. Thank you so much, because we could not do what we do as a community without the support which you provide."

Attendees were offered presentations from subject matter experts. A light lunch was served with refreshments and live music.

The garrison also hosted Retiree Appreciate Day at SHAPE Healthcare Facility Oct. 16. For inquiries about retiree services, call DSN 597-5581 or +32(0)68255581 or email usarmy.benelux.id-europe.mbx.dhr-retirement-services@mail.mil.



Coren Yastrzemy, center, wife of the U.S. Army Garrison Benelux commander, talks with community members during Wine and Whine Wednesday July 28, 2021 at the Chièvres Army Lodge at Chièvres Air Base, Belgium. (U.S. Army photo by Libby Weiler, USAG Benelux Public Affairs)

Spouses, others find networking in sponsorship, Wednesday wine event

Story and photos by Libby Weiler,
USAG Benelux Public Affairs

CHIÈVRES, Belgium – Taking advantage of the sunny lobby of the Army lodge at Chièvres Air Base July 28, spouses enjoyed wine and talked over the peculiarities newcomers face when living abroad and specifically living in Belgium.

Jokingly titled Wine and Whine Wednesday, the event began at the beginning of the PCS season in June and is planned as a bi-weekly beginning in August and is part of a larger informal program called the Mon Ami Spouse Sponsorship, which helps spouses acclimate to their new home through networking and shared experience.

Coren Yastrzemy, the wife of the U.S. Army Garrison Benelux commander, began the program four months ago. She recalled that before she arrived to Belgium, the formal nature of the official sponsorship relation seemed to preclude a lot of questions, things such as whether slow-cookers and hair straighteners work in Europe.

"And you don't really want to put those types of questions on a public Facebook page necessarily," said Yastrzemy. "That's what this (program) is for. It could just be a texting relationship, social media messaging, you could talk on the phone, email – whatever you want it to be."

The program is simple. Spouses who are soon to arrive in the USAG Benelux community can email monamiprogram@gmail.com. Yastrzemy then pairs up the requesting spouse with a spouse volunteering to sponsor. She works with the garrison's Army Community Services to organize the event and the program.

Unlike a spouses' club, both Yastrzemy and members of ACS emphasized that this is much less formal.

Nadia Krajewski, the Volunteer Corps coordinator with ACS, elaborated on the name "Mon Ami," which means "my friend" in French.

"We were wanting to plan a better spouse sponsorship program, and we decided to do

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something more informal so people feel comfortable,” said Nadia Krajewski, ACS. “They can talk and get some assistance when they first arrive here.”

Krajewski went on to say that making friends is important to successfully integrating into Belgium. And making friends right away can help with the transition to Belgium.

“I know with me, I made lifelong friends in the lodge because it’s the easiest place to meet people, especially when you are in need and trying to figure everything out,” she said.

Yastrzemsky said the program is not limited to spouses and could be open to single Soldiers and civilians who do not yet have a line in the community. The program and the wine event are merely bridging the gap that many members of the community might feel upon their arrival.

“It’s open for everyone – the more the merrier,” she said. “The wider audience we can reach and the different types of people we can get, the better – and the sooner the connection, even prior to arriving to the Benelux, the better.

“If you’re a mom and you’re at the playground, you learn a lot of things,” she continued. “But if you are not at the playground socializing and you are getting here and you are totally stressed out, this is an outlet. At least the wine and whine is one outlet to help you get answers to those quick questions that will make a difference.”

The Wine and Whine Wednesday event usually lasts two hours. To start the conversation going, Yastrzemsky talks about issues newcomers to Belgium might face, such as finding trash and recycle bags, how bottles are recycled, and more. Representatives from ACS; housing; Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation; and other garrison directorates are there to join in the session as well. Questions are answered and new relationships are built.

U.S. Navy Capt. Corey Keniston and Sarah Keniston joined the event. They had moved to Belgium before, and Corey has been at the



BOTH PHOTOS: Participants at “Wine and Whine Wednesday” talk in the lobby of the Chievres Army Lodge, discussing the peculiarities of living in Belgium and in the Army in the garrison’s area of responsibility. (U.S. Army photos by Libby Weiler, USAG Benelux Public Affairs)

lodge since April, Sarah since early July. They were appreciative of this and other programs that have met them as newcomers.

“The hospitality of the community doing this, the churches rotating through and providing meals on Monday nights when nothing is open – all those things are great,” said Capt. Corey Keniston.

Yastrzemsky made clear that despite difficulties newcomers face arriving to Belgium, the rewards win out.

“Somebody told me once that it’s really hard to move here, but it’s even harder to leave,” said Yastrzemsky. “It’s going to be very difficult your first couple of months, but then you are going to fall in love with the beauty of the Benelux, and you are not going to want to leave.”

Although the wine and whine event is limited to the Army Lodge at Chievres, the Mon Ami program fosters spouse connections across the entire Benelux community. To join the Mon Ami Spouse Sponsorship program, email monamiprogram@gmail.com.



File photo of AFNorth International School

DoDEA EU-West ranks among top during periodic accreditation

Story by Bryan Gatchell,
USAG Benelux Public Affairs

ZAVENTEM, Belgium – During their most recent five-year accreditation cycle, the schools of U.S. Army Garrison Benelux in Belgium and the Netherlands and several others in the district earned a high distinction from their accrediting institute.

Cognia, an accreditation and certification organization headquartered out of Alpharetta, Georgia, recognized the Department of Defense Education Activity – Europe, West District (DoDEA EU-West), headquartered at Zaventem, Belgium, as a system of distinction.

Cognia accredits more than 30,000 public and private schools across the U.S.

as well as all DoDEA schools both domestically and internationally. During Cognia’s accreditation, of 1,233 engagement reviews, they found 80 institutes distinguished themselves. One of those 80 was DoDEA EU-West.

“It was remarkable to be able to recognize the work of our principals, our teachers, our teacher leaders and those who really put the work in,” said Melissa Hayes, superintendent for Brussels, AFNorth, SHAPE and Spangdahlem community. “It’s not just the paperwork and check the box, it’s the day-to-day, making sure that students have access to equitable and rigorous education, making sure they have access to teachers that differentiate their instruction, making sure that the culture is one that goes beyond the warm

and welcome kind of feeling you get at an elementary school or even a high school."

DoDEA and other U.S. schools must achieve accreditation in order for their students to graduate and either attain work or move on to a university, college or other institute of higher education. All DoDEA schools must continuously improve through monitoring and evaluating their efforts yearly. They must perform a self-assessment using Cognia's diagnostic method. They must perform an annual evaluation of student performance. And they must host a one-day accreditation visit at all schools in the district.

Within Cognia's accreditation rubric, the district as a whole exceeded expectations.

In addition to those schools within USAG Benelux's footprint (SHAPE Community Schools and Brussels Elementary / High School in Belgium and AFNorth Community Schools in the Netherlands), DoDEA EU-West also oversees Kleine Brogel Elementary School in Belgium, Spangdahlem Community Schools in Germany, and Alconbury and Lakenheath Community Schools in the United Kingdom.

The schools themselves have also been high-performing. In 2019, the U.S. Department of Education recognized AFNorth Middle / High School in Brunssum, the Netherlands as a National Blue Ribbon School. In 2021, the Brussels Elementary / High School received the same honor. The blue ribbon designation means the schools have either performed excellently in academics or have closed significant achievement gaps among certain student subgroups. In the case of the Brussels Elementary / High School, a large portion of the studentry face the challenge of knowing English as a second language while working through an English curriculum.

The students among DoDEA schools, and especially overseas DoDEA schools, face other considerable challenges, according to Hayes. Families often move from one assignment to another in a wholly different part of the globe within a certain number of years. Often it may be difficult for Families to find roots within a country or community whose

languages they do not speak. Service members with Families may also have to deploy for extended periods of time. But military children have other big advantages.

"All of our students have at least one parent who is employed," said Hayes. "All of our students have access to health care, dental care. All of our students have access to resources – medically and in the emotional and mental health realms, if needed. So we consistently realize that we have that advantage over some of our public schools in the states."

Of course, during the accreditation period, the children and faculty of DoDEA EU-West were undergoing another crisis.

"Now that we've added COVID, not only do we worry about students' health and mental health, we have to worry about our staff," said Hayes.

COVID-19 even affected the evaluation, which was initially performed remotely and virtually but was then followed up with direct visits.

Kent Worford, the superintendent of DoDEA EU-West during the accreditation, who recently accepted a position as superintendent of the DoDEA Mid-Atlantic District, said the schools in Europe's West District help ensure service members their Families' educations are well in hand.

"Our schools really support the mission and our strong community-command partnership," said Worford. "We make that a focus to be engaged with the installation, command and the activities, and in return it really brought us to the forefront the past couple of years."

Hayes, though positive about the district being a "System of Distinction," looks more toward the future.

"It means we have a lot of work to carry on," said Hayes. "Once you reach that level, it would be easy to sit back and say, 'Yay, we're done.' But we're not done. We still have students to teach. And education theories are held tentatively, as they should be. Things are changing, things are improving, so we're in a constant state of improvement."

'LETTER'ALLY SCARY: Community members take part in a "Trunk-or-Treat" Halloween event at U.S. Army Garrison Benelux - Brussels Oct. 29, 2021. (U.S. Army photo by Bryan Gatchell, USAG Benelux Public Affairs)





FRONT AND BACK: Community members from the host nation enjoy the events of the inaugural Chièvres Air Fest Sept. 25, 2021. Events at the air fest included paratroopers and fireworks. (U.S. Army photos by Libby Weiler, front, and Jessica Abbas, back, USAG Benelux Public Affairs)

